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STATE FOR NEA/ARP

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [KU](#) [NATIONAL ASSEMBLY](#)
SUBJECT: INCREASING PESSIMISM ABOUT NEW CABINET, LEADERSHIP
REF: KUWAIT 430

Classified By: Ambassador Richard LeBaron for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary: Reactions to the new Cabinet have been muted, an indication of Kuwaitis' frustration with the political leadership in both the government and Parliament. Few Kuwaitis expect the new Cabinet to resolve the tensions that characterized the previous government's relations with Parliament, though some are mildly hopeful their skepticism is proven wrong. Some contacts predict this government is just a temporary solution to allow the ruling family time to prepare for new parliamentary elections later this year in the hope that the new five constituency electoral system will yield better results. End summary.

Gloomy View of New Cabinet

12. (C) Kuwaitis initially greeted the announcement of the new Cabinet on March 25 with cautious optimism, hoping the new lineup would assuage opposition parliamentarians and help resolve the tensions that have plagued government-Parliament relations since the elections last June (reftel). However, after a few days of reflection, many Kuwaitis are now expressing more pessimistic views. Members of a prominent Shi'a business family, including two former MPs and a former Oil Minister, were dismissive of the new government when asked their opinions by the Ambassador during a visit to their diwaniya. Several businessmen and a Kuwait University professor were also decidedly unenthusiastic about the new Cabinet and told EconChief that in spite of the new faces, it still reflected an "old mentality." While encouraged by the inclusion of two women, all three were impatient for change and a clearer sense of "direction" for the country, which they did not see represented in the new line-up. In a conversation with PolChief, Shi'a MP Hassan Jowhar expressed doubt about how long the new government would last, noting that some MPs had already threatened to bring members of the new Cabinet before Parliament for questioning, a constitutional procedure commonly referred to here as "grilling." He also speculated that the U.S. had given the Amir a "green light" to dissolve the Parliament again.

13. (C) An Islamist lawyer told PolOff that he had expected to see more new faces and that even those who were removed were given positions as advisors so they could continue to work from "in the shadows." He found it hard to believe that the ICM had accepted the new water and electricity portfolio, given that shortages in both are guaranteed this coming summer. He wondered whether it was a "trap" to hurt the Islamists or whether the ICM was just so desperate to join the cabinet that they were willing to accept anything. While the Education Minister has come under attack for being too liberal, one embassy contact who is intensively engaged in education policy issues said the new minister lacked vision and would not work for major policy reform. Others, however,

contended that she was a capable education administrator who should be given a chance to succeed.

Cabinet Too Liberal?

¶4. (C) Despite the inclusion of a senior member of the Islamic Constitutional Movement (ICM), the Kuwaiti Muslim Brotherhood's political wing, and one of the founding members of the Revival of Islamic Heritage Society (RIHS), a Kuwait-based Islamic charity, some Islamists have complained that the new Cabinet is "too liberal." In a March 27 editorial in Al-Watan (local Arabic daily), former Salafi MP Fahd Al-Khanna claimed "the new government groups a lot of liberals of Western tendencies" and called on Islamists "to resign their ministerial posts." He added: "All ministerial posts must be awarded to the liberals and let (them) be held accountable for the mistakes of the new government, given the fact that (it) is doomed to failure." Another Salafi told Political Specialist that the government "(did) not meet the ambitions of Islamists" and, despite the Prime Minister's extensive consultations, "failed to appease all parties." MP Mishari Al-Anjari, on the other hand, a member of the liberal National Action Bloc in Parliament, was upbeat about the Cabinet, saying it was non-confrontational and would receive more cooperation from Parliament. Many analysts agree that the composition was designed specifically to avoid confrontation. One told the Ambassador that the new Information Minister was chosen from the Awazim tribe because seven MPs are from that tribe.

Controversies on the Horizon

KUWAIT 00000447 002 OF 002

¶5. (C) Rumblings of future clashes between the government and Parliament have already begun. Independent Islamist MP Daifallah Bouramia has threatened to "grill" Minister of Finance Bader Al-Humaidhi, and Salafi MP Ahmed Baqer has continued his criticism of Dr. Abdullah Al-Maatouq, the Minister of Justice and the Minister of Religious Affairs. In a conversation with Political Specialist, Kuwait University Professor Dr. Ayed Al-Mana asked rhetorically, "Where is the logic in appointing a guy like Al-Muhailbi as Information Minister or replacing Dr. Adel Al-Tabtabaei with Nouriya Al-Sabih, with whom he is on bad terms?" Al-Mana said this was "not encouraging at all" and predicted the likelihood of future clashes. Some have also pointed out that ideological differences between ministers could lead to divisions within the Cabinet itself.

Hope for New Elections

¶6. (C) Dr. Abdullah Sahar, a Shi'a political science professor at Kuwait University, told PolOff this Cabinet was a short-term solution to political tensions, and predicted the Amir would dissolve Parliament and call new elections later this year. He believed the new five constituency electoral system would result in "more rational," better qualified MPs with broad appeal across sectarian, ideological, and tribal lines. Sahar claimed this would "reduce gaps between political blocs" in Parliament and lead to a more stable and efficient government capable of implementing a clear development program. ICM member Dr. Hamad Al-Matar agreed, arguing that the "government will not last long" and predicting that the Kuwaiti leadership would "experiment with elections under the five constituency system." However, most agree that such a development would likely come in the fall, after the long summer break. (Perhaps ministers can focus on their jobs in the interim.)

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LeBaron